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ABSTRACT

This book is part of a series that helps parents choose books for their children and talk with them about books in ways that actively engage children with the meaning on the printed page. The introduction, "Getting Started," notes that it is important for parents to continue sharing books with their children at this age. The first chapter, "Reading and Sharing with Children, Ages 8 & 9," offers guidelines for reading aloud and for book-sharing conversations, and discusses read-aloud strategies and conversation starters. The next chapter, "Choosing Books for Children, Ages 8 & 9," suggests and describes 17 books that match the developmental characteristics of readers at this age. It organizes them according to getting your child's attention, sharing with other children, identifying with characters, and reading favorite authors. The following chapter, "Reading and Sharing with Children, Ages 10 & 11," discusses read-aloud strategies and conversation starters. It is followed by "Choosing Books for Children, Ages 10 & 11," which suggests and describes 30 books that meet children's developmental needs and that might fit their new, broadening interests. The next chapter describes 15 books on sensitive issues. A Conclusion reviews the most important points. (SR)

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Choosing Books for Children, Ages 8 to 11

Carl B. Smith

from

The Family Learning Association

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Clearinghouse on English, Reading, and Communication

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FAMILY LEARNING ASSOCIATION

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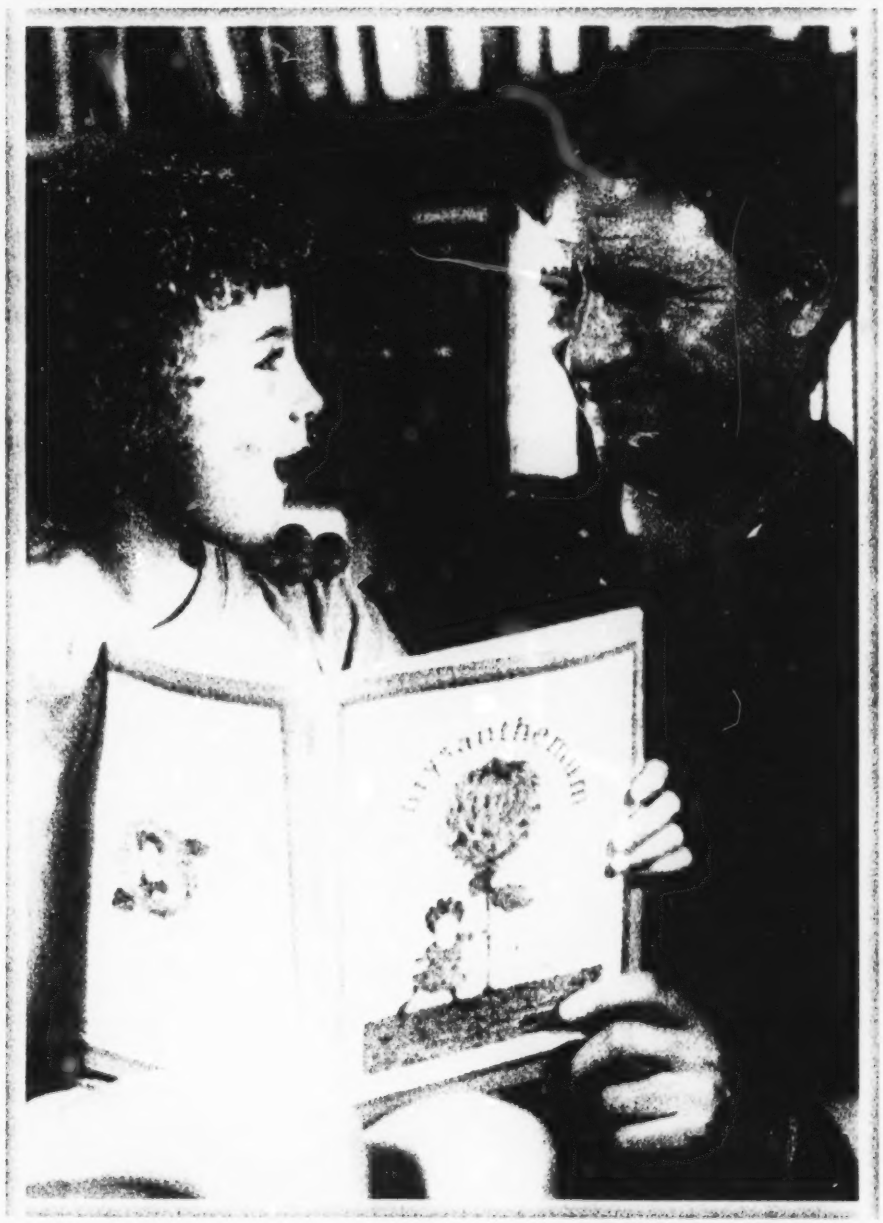


Getting Started

By the age of eight or nine, most children are fully aware of the important connection between printed words and spoken words. That is, they know that each word they see on the page is a representation of a single spoken word. Although they may use clues they see in illustrations as well as the sounds of initial consonants to decode unfamiliar words, they are definitely reading words rather than pictures.

When children begin to think of themselves as real readers, they are eager to show off their new skills. This means they often pester everyone within hearing distance to listen to them read. Ironically, at this stage many parents stop reading to or with their children. Just when youngsters have developed a new and vital relationship with books and are more enthusiastic than ever about reading, too many parents drop out of the picture. In this book, you will learn how to remain clearly *in* the picture. The best way to do that is to continue the book sharing that you began in earlier years.

Reading and Sharing with Children, Ages 8 and 9

One of the best ways to ensure your child's continued progress is to read to her and with her, even though she may be able to read more and more confidently on her own. This is because reading together promotes conversation, valuable time for communicating with each other. You'll also find a lot of wonderful benefits if you continue to read to your child at whatever age or stage of development. Why is that? The answer is simple. Reading to your child (whether she is four or fourteen) is one more very important way for you to reassure, entertain, instruct, inspire, and just generally get closer to your child. In addition, it will help make your child successful in school.

Reading aloud to your child is one more way for you to give her your attention and express your love for her. It is also a way for you to strengthen your child's reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. The influence pleasurable reading-aloud experiences usually have on children's listening skills is especially

important. Because our ability to read and comprehend print grows out of our ability to listen and then process ideas and information, good listening skills serve as the foundation for good reading skills. Both skills are important ingredients in children's success at school. In fact, many educators feel that a large part of our children's current reading problems have their roots in a breakdown of listening skills. If you often feel that your child doesn't listen to you when you talk to her, you could find that regular and enjoyable book-sharing sessions will improve her ability and willingness to listen.

TIP

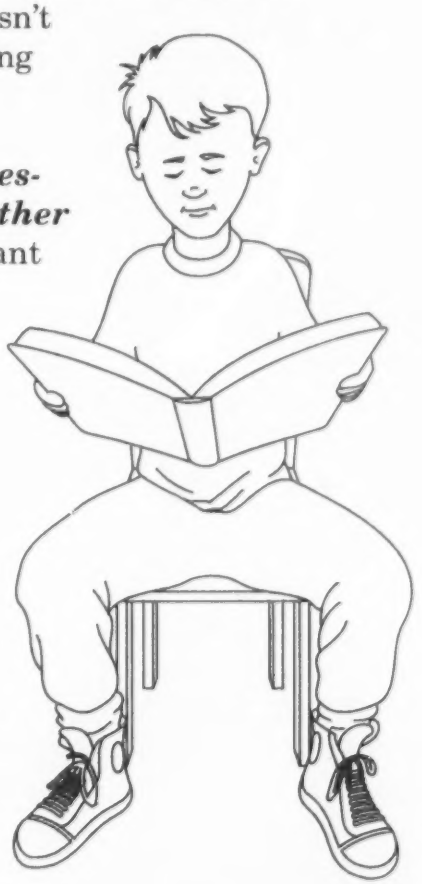
Help your child develop good listening skills, which lay the foundation for good reading skills.

Guidelines for Reading Aloud

Here are some suggestions for reading to children of all ages.

- ***Encourage your child to participate actively when you read aloud.*** Reading aloud creates an atmosphere much like a conversation. If you watch good readers, you will notice that they often make eye contact with their listeners and often stop to ask questions like "What do you think about that?" or "What do you think will happen next?"

- ***Make it a family affair.*** Even though your family may contain readers of several different ages and abilities, that doesn't mean you can't enjoy sharing the same book.



- ***Don't let your sharing session become just another reading lesson.*** If you want your kids to talk to you, adopt a conversational tone that shows you are sharing and not lecturing. Don't test your kids. Rather, make leading observations like "I wonder why this happened" or "Boy, that would scare me if I had been there!" or "If that had happened to us, how do you think we would have reacted?"

Guidelines for Book-Sharing Conversations

The following ideas will help you keep book-sharing converations going.

- ***Avoid dead-end questions.*** If you want to start a conversation with your child, avoid questions that require a "yes" or "no" or a single right answer in response. Ask questions that begin with "how" or "why." Don't be afraid to ask your kid questions to which you don't know the answer. Your goal in these conversations is to share with, not to test, your child.

- ***Repeat and extend your child's statements.*** Often just repeating the last few words of your child's statement can serve as an invitation for her to explain or elaborate on what she has said. Or you might pick up on some part of your child's conversation and extend it. If your child says something like "*Where the Wild Things Are* is my favorite book," you might say, "What happens in *The Wild Things* that makes it your favorite?" When you incorporate your child's own words into your reaction, you strengthen her confidence in her own verbal skills and you let her know that her opinions and ideas are valued.

- ***Share your own thoughts and reactions to books.*** Since our children usually take their first cues about how to behave from us, you can encourage your child to express his opinions about what you read together by voicing your own reactions. For example, if you and your child were discussing the novel *Hatchet,* you might express a personal reaction by saying, "I wonder if I would have been watching the controls and instruments well enough to crash-land that plane and survive."

- ***Define and reflect feelings.*** If your child hesitates to state her reactions to books, you might help her define and talk about her feelings by making a guess about what is going on with her. For instance, if your child seems particularly upset by an event in a book, you might say something like, "You look worried. Does this story remind you of your first day at school?" This soft approach is more likely to get a child to talk about her feelings than directly asking, "What's wrong?"

- ***Watch for cues.*** Your child will probably give you hints that let you know when he is ready to end a conversation. When he starts staring into space or giving really silly responses, it's probably time to stop.

Reading Strategies

At this crucial point you can do a lot to instill a love of books in a young reader. Here are some suggestions:

Just because your child can now read independently doesn't mean you should give up the pleasure of reading aloud to her. Continue to read to your child and invite her to take over and read to you whenever she wants to.

Offer invitations that are specific and have clear boundaries. For example, "Would you like to read the next paragraph?" or "Do you want to read a page and then I'll read a page?" But don't insist that your child read to you. If she doesn't want to read aloud, be prepared to do all the reading yourself.

Invite your child to be an active listener by stopping frequently to ask him questions or to invite him to comment on something that has happened in the story. When your child reads to you, participate by interrupting to reflect on something he's just read or to ask a question about the way the story is unfolding.

Don't play reading teacher. Just be a companion with whom your child can share and enjoy books. If your child stumbles over a word or phrase as she reads to you, help her. Here's a good rule of thumb: Silently count to five before you supply the troublesome word or phrase that has stumped your child. Correct her mistakes only if they drastically alter the meaning of the story. Make an effort to let your child know that this is relaxed time that you can spend simply reading and talking together about stories.

TIP

At this point, don't try to correct every mistake or "teach" reading. Just read to and with your child and talk about what you are reading.

Conversation Starters

Tap into your child's blossoming interest in what her peers think of her by asking questions that require her to consider different points of view. For example, if you were reading E. B. White's children's classic, *Charlotte's Web*, you might ask, "What do you suppose the goose (or the sheep or the rat) thought about Wilbur the pig? Whose opinion do you agree with?"

Even though children of this age are usually beginning to develop a new interest in peer acceptance, your child still needs repeated reassurance that everyone is different and that each individual develops at his or her own rate. You can nurture your child's sense of individuality by asking questions that point out the differences and similarities of characters in the books you read together. For instance, you might ask the following kinds of questions about *Charlotte's Web*:

- "How do you think Wilbur the pig's personality is different from Charlotte the spider's?" "How do they do things differently?"
- "If they are so different, why are they friends who are able to take care of each other?"
- "Who takes care of you?"
- "Whom do you take care of?"
- "How do you think you are different from or similar to so-and-so?"

Asking questions that require your child to identify with a character in a book can be a way of getting him to talk about and better understand his own feelings. For instance, in the book *A Taste of Blackberries*, Jamie gets stung by a bee when he and his best friend are playing together, and then Jamie dies. In addition to feeling grief about Jamie's death, his best friend is overcome by guilt because he laughed when Jamie knocked down the bee hive and then got chased by the bees. Asking your child to put herself in this situation and talk about how she would feel if her best friend got hurt or got in serious trouble is one way of encouraging your child to define her own feelings and to talk about those feelings she has for other people.

Eight- and nine-year-olds often become interested in reading several books by the same author. This gives them the pleasant opportunity to become experts on a particular writer. Sharing books in a series with your young reader can open up interesting possibilities for book-sharing conversations. Conversations about "series" books are an especially good way to explore your child's increasingly sophisticated understanding of how the past compares with the present. Questions like "Do you remember when such-and-such happened to Laura in the first *Little House* book we read? What do you think she would do if that happened to her now?" rely on the sense of continuity this kind of reading provides.

You can even extend questions of this kind into invitations for your child to tell you his version of stories from the past. Play the "remember when" game and ask your son or daughter to give you his version of an experience you both shared. You may be surprised to learn that he remembers it quite differently than you do. Having stories to tell about ourselves and getting a clear view of our own personal history is one way of saying, "This is who I am and here's how I got to be this person."

TIP

Keep your conversation going by helping your child identify with characters, talking about books in a series, and remembering things that happened in the past.

Choosing Books for Children, Ages 8 & 9

Parents who want to encourage their children to read find it helpful to know some general characteristics of the interests and abilities we can expect for a given age group. You can use the following chart to help you understand your child's changing tastes and activities. This will give you a better idea of the kinds of books your child might enjoy. Remember, it's *interest,* even more than academic performance, that determines whether or not a child will become a life-long devoted reader.

Getting Your Child's Attention

As children mature and become more confident about their reading skills, their ability to read silently and independently increases. At this stage, some children may read with complete concentration while others may still need lots of help recognizing words. Most eight- to nine-year-old readers are beginning to genuinely enjoy reading by themselves, but the plea-

Children Ages 8 & 9

Developmental Characteristics	Reading Interests	Books
Wide range of reading interest and ability levels among individuals; increasing stamina for reading lengthier books; still enjoys read-aloud stories	Enjoys uninterrupted time for reading; books provide pleasure and relaxation.	Charlotte's Web Sarah, Plain and Tall The Littles Homer Price The Mouse and the Motorcycle The New Kid on the Block The Best Christmas Pageant Ever Imogene's Antlers Pecos Bill
Peers are important; developing empathy for others; begins to offer opinion and establish standards of right and wrong.	Enjoys books with characters (s)he can identify with; interested in exploring how "others" feel and react; interested in books that don't always have a happy ending.	Danny the Champion of the World The Indian in the Cupboard A Taste of Blackberries Ida Early Comes over the Mountain A Dog Called Kitty The Little House series
Exhibits improved motor skills, and an increasing interest in hobbies, crafts, sports, and games.	Enjoys "how-to" books that provide practical information; likes to collect things; begins to look for books by one author or that are part of a series.	The Encyclopedia Brown series Matt Christopher's Sports series

sure of reading aloud with teachers and parents is still very important for them. Such experiences will go a long way toward encouraging these young readers to expand their reading interests and develop positive attitudes about reading. This is a prime time for parents to help their children discover that reading is an enjoyable activity. Books that generally hold children's attention both for silent reading and for read-aloud sessions with parents and teachers include:

- ***Charlotte's Web*** by E. B. White. As you read this well-loved story, you will meet Wilbur, the gentle pig, and the beautiful and intelligent spider who saves his life.

- ***Sarah, Plain and Tall*** by Patricia MacLachlan. Anna and Caleb's father haven't sung since their mother died. When their father advertises for a wife, Sarah, who is plain and tall and who sings, comes into their lives and brings the ocean with her.

- ***The Littles*** by John Peterson. This is a series about "little people." The series centers on a colony of six-inch people who live inside the walls of the Bigg family's home.

- ***Homer Price*** by Robert McCloskey. This is a hilarious collection of stories about a small-town boy's neighborhood dilemmas.

Sharing with Other Children

As children become more interested in their neighborhood and school environments, the acceptance and opinions of their peers become more important to them. Children of this age seem especially interested in reading books that others their age have read and recommended. Sharing favorite books with their peers gives eight- and nine-year-olds the sense that reading is fun and has group approval. Books that reflect these readers' new interest in their peers include:

- ***The Mouse and the Motorcycle*** by Beverly Cleary. When Keith leaves his toy motorcycle behind while he goes on vacation with his family, the toy motorcycle becomes a real motorcycle for Ralph, the mouse.

- ***The New Kid on the Block*** by Jack Prelutsky. This book filled with surprises, jokes, riddles, and

giggles also contains over a hundred poems ranging from rhymed couplets to long narratives. The funny animal poems are surpassed only by the funny people poems.

- ***The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*** by Barbara Robinson. The worst-behaved family of kids in town comes to Sunday school and gets all the parts for the Christmas pageant.
- ***Imogene's Antlers*** by David Small. In this funny tale, Imogene wakes up one day to find she has grown antlers. After she tries all types of silly disguises, Imogene wakes up the next day to find her antlers have been replaced by a beautiful fan of peacock feathers.
- ***Pecos Bill*** by Ariane Dewey. As legend has it, Pecos Bill was a Texan who was raised by coyotes. When he grows up and meets a cowboy named Curly Joe, his legendary adventures begin.

Identifying with Characters

We all like to read books about characters we can identify with—characters whose personal qualities we would like to have or whose lives we would, in a sense, like to live. Eight- and nine-year-old readers are beginning to tap into this motivation for recreational reading. Their increasingly more developed capacity for identifying with others allows them to begin to put themselves in another's shoes and see the "other side" of situations and events. Providing kids in the middle-elementary grades with stories about characters with whom they can identify helps these children explore their feelings for others.

As you read and discuss such stories with your child, ask questions that invite her to offer her opinion about differing points of view. These young readers' new interest in others may lead them to become curious about death. Readers of this age are becoming willing to accept some books that have less than happy endings. Books that reflect this stage of development include:

- ***Danny the Champion of the World*** by Roald Dahl. This is a story about an adventure a motherless boy and his father have together.

- ***The Indian in the Cupboard*** by Lynne Reid Banks. Omri's adventures begin when the plastic Indian he's been given for his birthday comes to life.

- ***A Taste of Blackberries*** by Doris B. Smith. When Jamie suddenly dies, his best friend must face the reality of death and cope with his great sense of loss.

- ***Ida Early Comes over the Mountain*** by Robert Burch. During the Depression, a clumsy young woman shows up to take over the houshold chores for Mr. Sutton and his four motherless children.

- ***A Dog Called Kitty*** by Bill Wallace. A young boy struggles to overcome his fear of dogs.

Reading Favorite Authors

This is the age at which children typically develop interests in collecting, sports, and other hobbies. They like adventure and appreciate the continuity of reading several books by the same author—especially ones that extend a theme or a single story over several different books. You might suggest the following books to your young reader:

- **The *Little House*** series by Laura Ingalls Wilder. In this historical fiction series, the author describes the growing-up years of the Ingalls girls and the Wilder boys. Based on the author's own life, the books portray the hardships and difficulties of pioneer life in the 1870s and 1880s and describe the fun and excitement that was also a part of daily living in those days.

- **The *Encyclopedia Brown*** series by Donald Sobol. This popular mystery series gives the reader a chance to match wits with a clever boy. Mr. Brown, chief of police of Idaville, brings home all the cases his men cannot solve. At dinner he describes them to his son, Encyclopedia Brown, who usually solves them before it is time for dessert.

- **The *Sports*** series by Matt Christopher. Matt Christopher's many sports stories include titles for young readers as well as for those in middle school. Sports fans will love his action-packed books (each covers a different sport) about kids who must confront problems as they pursue the sport of their choice.

If you think your six-year-old will enjoy reading some of the books listed in sections describing books for older children, don't feel limited by the age breakdowns presented here. Likewise, if your nine-year-old enjoys reading picture books, don't discourage him. As long as the book provides reading enjoyment, it has accomplished the right purpose.

One young reader says her friends give her good ideas about books she'll find interesting:

> *"I still like reading books about animals, and I also like the* Baby-Sitter Club *books, but I'm more willing to read other types of books now. I listen to the other kids talk about books they're reading. That helps me decide what I want to read next."*

Reading and Sharing with Children, Ages 10 and 11

Reading Strategies

Because kids at this age generally have confidence in their reading skills, striking a balance between shared and independent reading is a good idea with children at this stage.

- Even those kids who are teetering on the verge of adolescence still love being read to. If you stopped reading to your child several years ago but now you want to share books with him, you may discover that he has some resistance to the idea. Be persistent: read high-interest material to him or with him and do so regularly and for short periods of time. His enjoyment of a good story will eventually win out over his feeling that being read to is "just for babies."
- You can alternate roles as reader and listener by deciding to trade off reading chapters of the book aloud to one another. When you are the listener, make it a habit to interrupt occasionally to ask questions or to comment on how the story is developing. When your child is the listener, encourage her to participate in the reading by interrupting

whenever she wants to offer her own comments and questions. Keep your reading sessions relaxed.

- More advanced and confident readers will certainly be able to read chapters or sections of the book independently. If you decide that each of you will read the book on his own, you may want to make a habit of marking your favorite passages (small Post-It™ Notes work well for this) and then reading them aloud to one another when you come together for your book-sharing conversations.
- At this age, when kids are trying to make sense of gender roles, it's especially important that book sharing is a family affair. Fathers should make an extra effort to read with children. Because the vast majority of elementary school teachers are women, boys often associate reading with women and school work.

Conversation Starters

Most ten- and eleven-year-olds develop their own opinions—ones which may or may not reflect the convictions of their parents. It's important that you respect and avoid censoring the views your child expresses in book-sharing conversations. Simply expressing your own opinions is one way of doing this. You can agree to disagree by making statements like, "I understand and respect your opinion, but I believe..." If your book-sharing conversations are to be meaningful for both of you, you will need to allow your child to express views that contradict your own. Unfortunately, disagreeing with Mom or Dad is usually one of the ways kids of this age assert their independence and individuality. Recognize those disagreements as part of growing up, not as a personal attack that you will have to squelch.

Books that portray young characters who must interpret and solve moral problems can give you and your child opportunities to discuss important values. For instance, if you and your child are reading *Shiloh*, the story about a boy named Marty who takes in (and in effect steals) a beagle that belongs to his neighbor, you might ask your son or daughter to work out the problem of whether the fact that the neighbor was known for abusing his dogs justifies Marty's dishonesty. Asking your child to consider alternate courses of action is one way to drive home the point that there is usually more than one way to solve a problem. Asking questions like "What do you think would have happened if Marty had reported the man to the people at the Humane Society?" is a way of emphasizing the fact that all actions have consequences and that those consequences can often be predicted and considered before we take action. Book-sharing conversations that focus on the many aspects of right and wrong are a way for you to encourage your child to take further responsibility for his own behavior.

During this period when kids are figuring out for themselves what it means to be male or female, discussing gender-roles and stereotypes gives you opportunities to help. Boys and girls may have completely different reactions to a book like *There's a Girl in My Hammerlock*. Asking questions like "Why do you think Maisie decided to become a wrestler instead of doing something else that girls usually do?" is a way for you to encourage your child to examine,

rather than simply accept, the common definitions of what boys and girls can be and do.

During pre-adolescence, when most children's attitudes toward parental authority and family relationships are changing, book-sharing conversations can give both you and your child opportunities to see the other side of the situation. Eda LeShan's book *When Grown-ups Drive You Crazy* (yes, LeShan has also written a book for parents called *When Your Child Drives You Crazy*) can give you an opportunity to ask questions like "Do I ever make you feel that way about yourself?"

Although honest answers to such questions may not always be comforting for parents, such questions and answers can help to build bridges of understanding between parents and children at a time when communication tends to become increasingly difficult.

Reading books like *The Westing Game* can give you and your child chances to have fun with her developing analytical and problem-solving skills. Predicting what will happen next or gathering clues in order to make a guess about who is responsible for the crime can be lots of fun. When you use prediction questions with your child, make a special effort to avoid creating a situation that makes your child feel she is being tested. Offer your own predictions as a way of showing your whole-hearted participation. Then you can see whether either of you came close to the actual result.

Choosing Books for Children, Ages 10 and 11

Think for a minute about the books that were your childhood favorites. Surely you liked those books so much because, in part, they portrayed characters with whom you could identify. If you keep that fact in mind, helping choose books for your 10- or 11-year-old child will be much simpler and more pleasurable for both of you. The chart below gives you an idea of the developmental stage your child has probably reached, along with those interests which are common for this age group. Remember—these are only guidelines.

Growing Up

Selecting appropriate books for ten- and eleven-year-olds can go a long way toward helping them understand the rapid growth process many of them are currently experiencing. Although the rate of physical development varies widely at this age (girls are typically about two years ahead of boys), a rapid growth spurt usually precedes the beginning of puberty. Boys and girls continue to have somewhat dif-

Children Ages 10 and 11

Developmental Characteristics	Reading Interests	Books
Experiencing rapid physical growth; curious about all aspects of sex; trying to make sense of gender roles; forming ideas about their own and others' identities; increasingly concerned about belonging to a peer group.	Enjoys books that provide information about gender roles; likes books that help her/him to understand personal problems.	Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret A Solitary Blue Park's Quest The Giver There's a Girl in My Hammerlock Summer of My German Soldier Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry Number the Stars Homecoming The Pinballs
Challenges the authority of adults; critical of siblings and young children; seeks role models from TV, movies, sports figures, and books.	Enjoys reading that provides insight into changing relationships; likes biographies of "real" people (s)he can identify with.	Jacob Have I Loved Dear Mr. Henshaw Dicey's Song The Great Gilly Hopkins
Desires to test own skills and abilities; looks ahead to his/her independence; becoming more concerned with analyzing problems of the world; empathizes with victims of injustice and suffering.	Enjoys mystery, science-fiction, and fantasy novels. Likes sad stories about death, illness, and other people's problems; enjoys survival stories about children "going it alone."	Hatchet Tuck Everlasting Julie of the Wolves From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler Across Five Aprils My Brother Sam is Dead Lyddie Shiloh Stone Fox The Land I Lost: Adventures of a Boy in Vietnam The Westing Game The Haunting The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH The Haunting of Francis Rain The Phantom Tollbooth

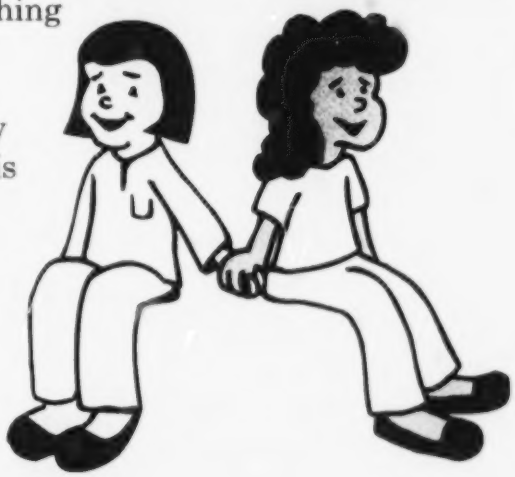
ferent reading preferences, but kids of both genders typically become increasingly curious about all aspects of sex. At this stage when they are trying to make sense of gender roles, boys and girls are forming ideas about their own and each other's identities. Books that provide information about gender roles and invite discussion of stereotypes include:

- ***Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*** by Judy Blume. In this funny and always honest story, a twelve-year-old girl confronts the crises of adolescence.
- ***A Solitary Blue*** by Cynthia Voigt. A young boy thinks the blue heron is a good symbol for his life until he understands the importance of his father's love.
- ***Park's Quest*** by Katherine Paterson. Park has built an image of his father, who was killed in Vietnam. In learning the truth about his father, he learns much about himself.
- ***The Giver*** by Lynn Hall. A fifteen-year-old girl and her teacher are attracted to one another. Because of the teacher's honesty and concern, both grow in confidence and determination.
- ***There's a Girl in My Hammerlock*** by Jerry Spinelli. When Maisie Potter doesn't make the last cut in cheerleading try-outs, she waits for the next season's sports to begin and goes out for wrestling. Maisie becomes the first (and only) female member of the team and surprises everyone with her skill and endurance.
- ***Summer of My German Soldier*** by Bette Greene. A Jewish girl feels all alone in a small town during World War II until she befriends a German prisoner of war.

Responding to Peer Pressure

Ten- and eleven-year-olds begin to place an increased emphasis on the opinions and values of their peer group. More than ever before, their book choices tend to be influenced by the preferences of their peers. They say they like books about "kids like us." Their concern about "being in" and "being out" with their peer group can result in some expressions of prejudice and in the deliberate exclusion of others. Books can be used to point out the unique qualities of different racial, ethnic, or social groups of people. Book-sharing conversations can also be a great place to clarify and discuss personal and family values. Books appropriate for this aspect of these young readers' development include:

- ***Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*** by Mildred Taylor. This is an unforgettable story about African American heritage and pride.
- ***Number the Stars*** by Lois Lowry. This story is set in 1943 in Denmark when the Jews are being "relocated." Annemarie must find the strength to go on a mission to save her best friend's life.
- ***Homecoming*** by Cynthia Voigt. A thirteen-year-old travels many miles with her younger brothers and sister searching for a home.
- ***The Pinballs*** by Betsy Byars. This book tells the story of three children who have been placed in a foster home.



Seeing the Other Side

Any parent of a ten- or eleven-year-old typically begins to notice that his child's attitude toward parental authority and family relationships is beginning to change. Children of this age tend to become more critical of their parents and of their siblings. Book-sharing conversations can be a good way to keep the channels of communication open and to provide insight into changing family relationships. The following books can provide opportunities for both parents and children to "see the other side" of situations, events, and relationships:

- ***Jacob Have I Loved*** by Katherine Paterson. Louise, who envies her twin sister's talent and beauty, searches for her own identity.

- ***Dear Mr. Henshaw*** by Beverly Cleary. This diary of a young boy traces his personal growth from first to sixth grade. The diary tells the story of his parent's divorce, and how his relationships with them changed as a result of it. The boy also writes about how it feels to be the "new kid" in school. His diary also chronicles his changing relationship with an author to whom he writes over the years. Most importantly, the diary tells the story of the boy's changing relationship with himself.

- ***Dicey's Song*** by Cynthia Voigt. This is the sequel to the book *Homecoming*. In this novel, a thirteen-year-old girl takes charge of her younger siblings when her mother abandons them. The story portrays the children's life with their grandmother, who lives on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

- ***The Great Gilly Hopkins*** by Katherine Paterson. Gilly is a swearing, self-sufficient girl who is in and out of foster homes. When she arrives at her next foster home, Gilly can't bear the huge and semi-literate Maime Trotter. However, life with Maime Trotter, from whom she learns to accept and give love for the first time, prepares Gilly for a reunion with her real family.

Searching for Independence

During this peak time for voluntary reading, ten- and eleven-year-olds especially enjoy stories about survival and "going it alone." As they look ahead to a time when they will be independent of their parents, they become increasingly interested in testing their own skills and abilities. Stories about children "going it alone" include:

- ***Hatchet*** by Gary Paulsen. A thirteen-year-old boy is the lone survivor of a plane crash in the Canadian wilderness.

- ***Tuck Everlasting*** by Natalie Babbitt. In this exciting adventure story, a young girl stumbles on the Tuck family's home in frontier country and learns their great secret.

- ***Julie of the Wolves*** by Jean Craighead George. With the help of a pack of Arctic wolves, Julie struggles to survive on the North Slope of Alaska.

- ***From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiller*** by Elaine L. Konigsburg. When Claudia talks her nine-year-old brother Jamie into running away with her, she chooses the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City as a refuge.

Feeling Concern for Others

As kids in the later elementary grades try to figure out their own identities and gender roles, their search for values leads them to become more interested in the problems of the world. They typically have a highly developed sense of justice and concern for others. They also tend to like sad stories about death, illness, and other people's problems—stories that allow them to empathize with the victims of injustice and suffering. Book-sharing conversations which focus on the many aspects of right and wrong behavior are of special interest to them. Books that raise such issues include:

- ***Across Five Aprils*** by Irene Hunt. Jethro is too young to fight in the Civil War, but he watches his older brothers go off to join opposing armies. Jethro's family suffers as the neighbors seek vengeance.

- ***My Brother Sam Is Dead*** by James L. and Christopher Collier. A sixteen-year-old boy joins the Continental Army against his parents' wishes.

- ***Lyddie*** by Katherine Paterson. Lyddie and other factory girls must struggle against the unbearable working conditions in the Lowell, Massachusetts, mills of the 1840s.

- ***Shiloh*** by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor. Marty Preston befriends a stray beagle that belongs to a neighbor known for abusing his animals.

- ***Stone Fox*** by John Reynolds Gardiner. Willie enters his dog Searchlight in a dogsled race to help his sick grandfather pay off the back taxes on the farm.

- ***The Land I Lost: Adventures of a Boy in Vietnam*** by Quang Hhuong. This fictionalized memoir tells the story of the people, customs, and animals the author encountered during his boyhood in a small Vietnamese village.

Solving Problems

Ten- and eleven-year-olds' growing analytical and problem-solving skills lead them to tackle more complicated stories and to see book plots as puzzles their imaginations and analytical thinking skills can help them work out. They are also beginning to appreciate more subtlety in humor. Mystery, science-fiction, and fantasy novels are often interesting at this age. Books that reflect this stage of development include:

- ***The Westing Game*** by Ellen Raskin. In this wonderfully clever mystery only the reader has all of the clues.

- ***The Haunting*** by Margaret Mahy. Shy Barney Palmer is receiving unwanted messages from a ghostly relative, but he is afraid to tell anyone.

- ***The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*** by C. S. Lewis. Four children discover that a stuffy wardrobe closet leads to the magic kingdom of Narnia. This is the first of seven books called *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

- ***Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*** by Robert C. O'Brien. In this fantasy/science-fiction tale, a group of rats become super-intelligent through a series of laboratory injections.

- ***The Haunting of Francis Rain*** by Margaret Buffie. Lizzie finds an old pair of glasses and is transferred back in time when she tries them on.

- ***The Phantom Tollbooth*** by Norton Juster. Milo embarks on an exciting adventure in a strange country of edible words and mysterious creatures as he visits the Kingdom of Wisdom.

Books on Sensitive Issues

- ***Diving for the Moon*** by Lee F. Bantle. The summer after they finish the sixth grade, Bird discovers that her best friend Josh is HIV positive. (**AIDS**)
- ***My name is Brain Brian*** by Jeanne Betancourt. Although he is helped by his new sixth grade teacher after being diagnosed as dyslexic, Brian still has some problems with school and with people he thought were his friends. (**Disability**)
- ***What Hearts*** by Bruce Brooks. After his mother divorces his father and remarries, Asa's sharp intellect and capacity for forgiveness help him deal with the instabilities of his new world. (**Coming Of Age—Male**)
- ***Spike It!*** by Matt Christopher. Unhappy at having to share space and family with her new stepsister Michaela when her father remarries, thirteen-year-old Jamie is further dismayed when Michaela joins her volleyball team and becomes a star player. (**Step-Family**)

- ***Dear Mr. Henshaw*** by Beverly Cleary. In his letters to his favorite author, ten-year-old Leigh reveals his problems in coping with his parents' divorce, being the new boy in school, and generally finding his own place in the world. (**Divorce**)

- ***It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing up, Sex, and Sexual Health*** *by* Robie H. Harris and Michael Emberley. Providing answers to questions children may have about sexuality. (**Sexuality**)

- ***Out of the Dust*** by Karen Hesse. In a series of poems, fifteen-year-old Billie Jo relates the hardships of living on her family's wheat farm in Oklahoma during the dust bowl years of the Depression. (**Coming Of Age—Female**)

- ***A Season of Comebacks*** by Kathy Macket. Ten-year-old Molly competes for the attention of her father, who seems to be only interested in cultivating the talent of Molly's older sister Allie, a star softball pitcher. (**Sibling Rivalry**)

- ***Parrot in the Oven: mi vida*** by Victor Martinez. Manny relates his coming-of-age experiences as a member of a poor Mexican American family in which the alcoholic father only adds to everyone's struggle. (**Prejudice, Substance Abuse**)

- ***Scorpions*** by Walter Dean Myers. After reluctantly taking on the leadership of the Harlem gang, the Scorpions, Jamal finds that his enemies treat him with respect when he acquires a gun—until a tragedy occurs. (**Gangs**)

- ***Awake and Dreaming*** by Kit Pearson. While living a poverty-stricken life with her irresponsible mother, nine-year-old Theo dreams of belonging to

a real family but finds a shadowy figure haunting her thoughts. (**Dysfunctional Family**)

- ***Holes*** by Louis Sachar. As further evidence of his family's bad fortune which they attribute to a curse on a distant relative, Stanley Yelnats is sent to a hellish correctional camp in the Texas desert where he finds his first real friend, a treasure, and a new sense of himself. (**Juvenile Delinquency**)

- ***Maniac Magee*** by Jerry Spinelli. After his parents die, Jeffrey Lionel Magee's life becomes legendary, as he accomplishes athletic and other feats which awe his contemporaries. (**Homelessness, Prejudice**)

- ***Belle Prater's Boy*** by Ruth White. When Woodrow's mother suddenly disappears, he moves to his grandparents' home in a small Virginia town where he befriends his cousin and together they find the strength to face the terrible losses and fears in their lives. (**Loss and Identity**)

- ***I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*** by Jacqueline Woodson. Marie, the only black girl in the eighth grade willing to befriend her white classmate Lena, discovers that Lena's father is doing horrible things to her in private. (**Child Sexual Abuse, Poverty**).

Conclusion

Keep the following guidelines in mind as you talk about books with children in the early grades.

Reading and Sharing with Children, Ages 8 and 9

- Continue to read aloud to children, even as they grow older, to show them that *reading is important* to you and should be important to them as well.
- Help children develop their *listening skills* by reading aloud to them, no matter what their age.
- Encourage *active participation*—talking about the book as you read—to create a positive, conversational atmosphere.
- Make *leading observations* as you talk and share ideas; don't test your child on details.

- Ask broad, *open-ended questions*—"Why?" and "How?" are good words to start with.
- *Repeat and extend* your child's statements, encouraging her to explain and elaborate on what she has said.

Children at this age level like books that do the following things:

- Hold their attention and encourage them to keep reading.
- Help them relate to other children.
- Encourage them to relate to characters in the story.
- Discover favorite authors who have written series of books about a central character.

Reading and Sharing with Children, Ages 10 and 11

As children become more confident in their reading skills, they will spend more and more time in independent reading. Even so, your shared reading should remain important as well.

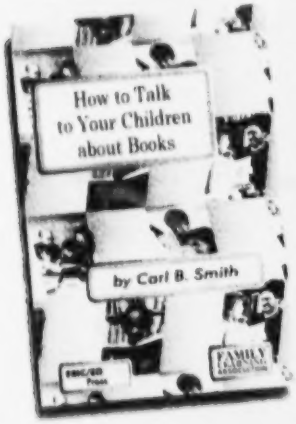
- Alternate reading and listening, and don't hesitate to comment on what is being read.
- Notice favorite passages when you and your child are reading independently, and then share them when you are together.
- Try to have all members of the family, including both parents, join in the reading and sharing.
- Respect your child's opinions even when you share ideas that may not agree.
- Encourage your child to talk about problems that are discussed in stories, and help them consider alternate courses of action when they encounter complex problems.
- Provide opportunities for children to develop analytical skills by solving problems and trying to predict what may happen next in a story.

When you are looking for books for your ten- or eleven-year-old to read, remember that these topics are of particular interest:

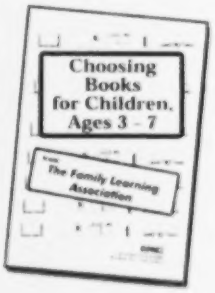
- Stories about growing up can help children understand the process they are going through.

- Responding to peer pressure can be dealt with through stories that deal with this issue.
- Stories can also help children become aware that there are different points of view about the same situation or question.
- The search for independence can also be discussed through stories that present characters who are learning to go it alone.
- Stories can help children learn to feel concern for others.
- Children like to read stories that present problems and let them develop their thinking skills as they try to figure out what to do.

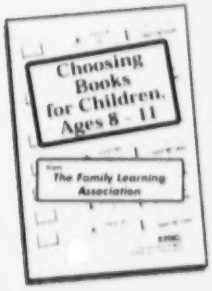
If you found this book useful, please try the other books in the Series!



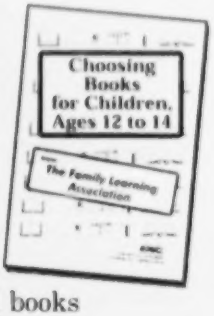
How to Talk to Your Children about Books *by Carl B. Smith*
Start a conversation that will last a lifetime. This book teaches you five easy techniques to prompt book discussions, guidelines for selecting books, how to make it a two-way exchange, plus motivation, values, and making it fun!



Choosing Books for Children, Ages 3 to 7
Use this resource to appeal to a variety of interests in your kindergarten to primary-age children. Filled with great tips for keeping book conversations going, this book pinpoints a vast array of age-appropriate reading materials.



Choosing Books for Children, Ages 8 to 11
Quick summaries of a huge collection of titles will make it easy to provide good reading for your pre-teens. Top-notch authors, relevant themes, and sensitive issues make this a good companion at the library or bookstore.



Choosing Books for Children, Ages 12 to 14
Let literature open up discussion about some of the difficult issues your teen is experiencing. Includes a special section on communicating about books though writing and journaling.

For information about these and other helpful books
The Family Learning Association
3925 Hagan Street, Suite 101, Bloomington, Indiana 47401
1.800.759.4723 www.kidscanlearn.com

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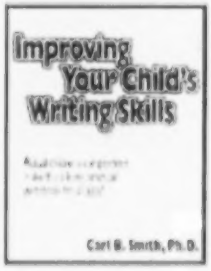
Other Resources Available

Tutoring Children in Reading and Writing

Book 1: Kindergarten
Book 2: Grades 1-2

These guidebooks use a hands-on approach to helping children improve essential skills. Using easy and effective activities, they focus on the building blocks of reading and writing with sample worksheets that focus on letter recognition, spelling, phonics, and comprehension.

Improving Your Child's Writing Skills



Using actual children's compositions, this fun guidebook takes kids through the entire process of writing, from Pre-Writing and Drafting to Revising and Proofreading. The practical work sheets form a framework to hone the skills of any young writer.

Helping Children to Learn SERIES

Improving Reading and Learning ***Reading to Learn***
Phonics and Other Word Skills ***Creating Life-Long Readers***
The Self-Directed Learner

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